

SECONDARY MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH FAMILY NAMES*

The term 'secondary motivation' stands for the known tendency of speakers to reintegrate unknown, unfamiliar and isolated words into the vocabulary of a language by associating them in sound and spelling with known and familiar words, although no etymological relation exists among the words.

The aim of this dissertation was to show if proper names (in this case English family names), which can also be isolated in the vocabulary, are also affected by the linguistic phenomenon of secondary motivation; and, if this is the case, to what extent they are affected; if there are regular patterns of secondary motivation in English family names; and, if there is a period in the history of the English language when secondary motivation was particularly productive.

Proper names are structured on two levels, the onomastic level - this relates directly to the onomastic characteristics of a place or person, and the appellative level - this level includes the appellative from which the name is derived. From a synchronic point of view, the onomastic level is the primary, the appellative level the secondary one, diachronically vice versa.

Secondary motivation in family names stems from the desire of the speaker to make the appellative level recognizable again if it has become obscured. There are various reasons for the loss or lack of clearness on the appellative level, e.g. the appellative is foreign; it has been obscured by regular phonological development; it belongs to a dialect or register unknown to the speaker; or the appellative has become extinct.

Secondary motivation appears in the least complex form as phonological motivation. We mean by this that the phonetic-phonemic structure of a name - if it differs from the English phonetic-phonemic system - is adapted to it, for instance by sound-substitution or changes in the stress pattern. This phonological motivation can lead to secondary motivation, if it results in a similarity of expression with one or more morphemes of English. Similarity of expression - without preceding phonological motivation - is sufficient to induce secondary motivation; the expected regular phonological development will then be interrupted.

In English, secondary motivated spellings are a specific case, which is brought about by the unique relationship of spelling and pronunciation which exists in English. Secondary motivated spelling is caused by phonetic similarity between a proper name and an appellative.

In order to restrict the enormous mass of material (there are ca. 60-80,000 family names in English), only names which complied with the following conditions were examined:

- a. diachronically the names had to consist of more than one morpheme, bound or free;
- b. synchronically only names which contained one or more free morphemes were taken into account (exception: names with the bound morphemes [-age, -ment]);
- c. the spelling of the names had to be identical with the spelling of an English appellative;

- d. additionally the pronunciation had to be identical with that of an English appellative;
- e. the phonological structure of the name had to comply with the English phonemic and phonotactic rules.

Of the total of 887 names examined 473 (53%) showed secondary motivation without preceding phonological motivation, 257 (29%) with preceding phonological motivation, and 157 (18%) secondary motivation in the spelling. Of the 887 names 556 (63%) had an English appellative level, 331 (37%) a foreign appellative level.

An examination according to whether the appellative level was English or foreign showed that names with foreign appellative level undergo more secondary motivation without preceding phonological motivation, 58% compared to 50% with English appellative level. That allows us to conclude that in this case similarity of expression is more important than phonological integration because the appellative level is completely obscured. Names with an English appellative level show a higher percentage of secondary motivation with preceding phonological motivation, 32% compared to 25%, a sign that integration into the phonological system comes first.

The proportion of secondary motivated spellings amounts to 18% of those names which have English morphemes as appellative level, compared to 17% of the names using foreign morphemes as appellative level.

Secondary motivation was particularly common in the period from the 16-18th century. In the 15th century the spelling and pronunciation of names started to break away from the general development of the appellatives. The trend towards uniformity of English spelling, roughly from 1685 onwards, helped to obscure the connections of proper names with their respective appellative levels and this gave rise to increased secondary motivation.

The amount of collected material was such that a full evaluation within the framework of a dissertation was not possible. A short outline, however, should be given of two developments which became evident during the compilation and sifting of the material and which appear worthy of further examination.

Firstly, if secondary motivated names are examined, without regard to their origin, a striking similarity - in respect of their semantic content - with nicknames becomes apparent: Alabaster, Digweed, Eatwell, Littlework, Playfoot, Quickfall, Would-have etc. In choosing nicknames as a model of adaptation the speaker shows clearly what he expects from a name: a name has to be clear and expressive and the best way to make an unfamiliar name clear is to form it like a nickname, because this type of name shows a very high degree of clarity. An attempt to form names according to e.g. local names could not provide the clarity which the speaker calls for to the extent that nicknames do.

Secondly, if the secondary motivated names are examined with regard to their origin, another fact attracts attention, namely that those derived from Old English personal names are especially affected by secondary motivation. The reason for this development is probably best seen in the context of the situation of Old English personal names from the 12th century onwards, when this type of name was gradually replaced by French personal

names. The Old English dithematic names fell into disuse, and phonological changes took place which helped these names to become more and more obscure. Therefore, the "demands" of unfamiliarity and unintelligibility which bring about secondary motivation were met.

The cases of secondary motivation in English family names demonstrate very clearly that this linguistic phenomenon is caused by the speaker's desire to create more clarity on the appellative level. This is emphasised by the fact that in nearly all cases where regular phonological development would lead to a name consisting of a single morpheme, the development is interrupted by secondary motivation and the outcome is again formally a compound. It is not necessarily a meaningful compound, e.g. Portwine; it is sufficient for the parts of the compound to be supported by English appellatives.

A thorough evaluation cannot be undertaken at this point. The material in this dissertation, however, will surely provide a basis for a better understanding of the origins and development of secondary motivated English family names.

NOTE

*This is a summary of a dissertation presented at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen-Nürnberg in 1980.

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COMMON GAELIC ÁIRGE, OLD SCANDINAVIAN ÆRGI OR ERG?*

In an important article published in Danish in 1956 Christian Matras drew attention to the fact that the form erg, which English toponymists use for a so-called Norse loan-word in English, does not occur in any Old Scandinavian sources.¹ Since this article appeared too late for the information to be included by Hugh Smith in English Place-Name Elements (1956), scholars outside Scandinavia have continued to use the form erg for this element. It has therefore seemed opportune to bring the question of the origin and significance of the word to the attention of the members of the Council for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland.

The relevant entry in Smith's book² begins as follows: 'erg ON, 'a shieling, a hill-pasture' (found in ON only in Orkneyinga saga) was current among Norw settlers in the NW and had been introduced by them from OIr or Gael (cf. MIr airge, Ir airghe, Gael airigh).' An examination of the files of the Arnamagnaen Dictionary of Old Norse in Copenhagen has confirmed that the only early West Scandinavian source to contain the word is the Icelandic Orkneyinga saga. This saga was originally compiled in the late twelfth century and two versions of it are known to have existed.³ One survives in a late fourteenth-century transcript in the famous codex Flateyjarbók. There is no complete Icelandic text of the second version of the saga but a translation was made of it into Danish about 1570 in Norway and this translation survives almost intact in a paper MS from 1615 in the Royal Library Stockholm (Cod. Isl. Papp. 39 fol.). Near the beginning of chapter 103 of the saga the Flateyjarbók version says: 'ok toku þar nockur gisting' (and took shelter for the night there), while the Danish translation reads (f. 92r): 'der som vaar noget erg det kalle wi setter, der bleffue de offuer om natten' (they spent the night at a place where there was an erg, which we call a shieling). There is no way of knowing whether this explanatory gloss was in the original Icelandic text of the second version of the saga or whether it was added by the translator. Towards the end of the same chapter the word reappears as an element in a place-name in the Caithness area, which has been tentatively identified by A. B. Taylor with Assery between Forsie and Loch Calder (Grid reference ND 0562).⁴ The Flateyjarbók text reads: 'til audnaselia nockurra þeirra er heita Asgrims ærgin' (to some deserted huts which are called Asgrims ærgin), while the Danish translation reads (f. 94r): 'til nogen eydesetter de som kaldis Asgrims erg'. These are the only occurrences of the word in Old Scandinavian sources. It will be noted that the form erg only occurs in the Danish translation of Orkneyinga saga and not in the surviving Icelandic text. This means that it is to be attributed to the sixteenth-century translator. An examination of the files of the Dictionary of Old Danish by its editor Allan Karker has revealed no other instance of the word in any spelling in Danish sources from between 1100 and 1515 and it is not recorded in Otto Kalkar's Ordbog Til Det Ældre Danske Sprog (1300-1700) (1881-1918) or Ordbog over det danske sprog (1919-56), which covers material from 1700 to the present day. There is also a Danish translation of the Flateyjarbók version of the saga. This was made by the Icelander Torfæus in 1661 and it survives in three paper MSS, two of which are probably copies of the first. Torfæus makes no use of the word erg. The first occurrence in chapter 103 is omitted altogether, while the place-name is omitted from the second occurrence. Torfæus also made a Latin translation of the saga, which was published in Copenhagen in 1697. In this abridged translation Torfæus deals with the second context by saying that the men came to æstiva, that is 'a summer camp, summer pastures for cattle' and then glosses this word as '(tuguria in montibus pascendis pecoribus, lactisque; cibus per æstivam conficiendis exstructa) id temporis vacua, Asgrimsægrin vocata'. This definition would seem to be directed at the expression audnaselia in the Flateyjarbók text rather than at the place-name element ærgin.⁵